

First, thank you to the many people who took time from their busy schedules to attend one of the 19 town meetings my staff and I held throughout the First District last week.

Unprecedented crowds attended each meeting. In fact, Mobile's Press-Register determined that as many as 2,000 people attended the four town meetings in Mobile County.

While many of the questions at these meetings surrounded the House Democrats' proposed health care plan, questions were also asked about the 2010 Census and the penalties for not participating.

As laid out in the Constitution, every 10 years each person living in the United States must be counted.

The main purpose of the census is to determine representation in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Electoral College. Census data are also used to determine the need for social services, block grants, and other grant programs.

Next spring, more than 130 million addresses across the country will receive a census form to be completed and returned to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Participation in the census is vital for the count to be accurate, and it is required by law. Citizens are obligated to respond to the census just as they are required to respond to jury duty, pay taxes and report income, and obtain a driver's license.

The fine for neglecting to complete the questionnaire or answer questions posed by census takers ranges from \$100 to \$5,000. The maximum penalty was increased in 1984 to \$5,000 as part of the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984.

The census form will arrive in your mailbox in March 2010. There are 10 questions, and it will take about 10 minutes to complete. Census Day is April 1, 2010, and all questionnaire responses should represent the household as it exists on this day.

As you complete your form, please keep in mind that by law, the Census Bureau cannot share your personal information with anyone, including other federal agencies and law enforcement entities.

Census workers will be required to visit households that do not return questionnaires. For more information on the 2010 census, you can visit [www.2010census.gov](http://www.2010census.gov).

Addressing a persistent rumor:

Recently, a number of constituents of the First District contacted my office to express their concerns over one topic in particular which has been the focus of many rumors: the retirement plans for members of Congress.

Over the years, I have frequently been contacted by residents of south Alabama expressing concern that members of Congress are able to retire, after only a few years service, at full salary. They are also expressing misguided concerns that congressmen and senators are not required to pay into the Social Security program.

I can certainly understand the frustration of many Americans over this – but any frustrations are completely misdirected, because this information is simply not true.

In fact, as a result of being circulated throughout the Internet and being included in what I am sure is, by now, millions of e-mail messages, this myth has taken on a life of its own.

Between 1946 and 1983, members of Congress were included in the old Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), the retirement program used by all federal workers.

Everyone in the government who participated in the program during this nearly four-decade period was exempt from paying into the Social Security program, since at that time it was considered duplicative.

However, this all changed in 1983 with the institution of the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS). This program mandated that all new federal employees, including members of both the House of Representatives and Senate, must participate in FERS and pay into Social Security.

A large majority of the members of Congress, myself included, are now paying into both FERS

and the Social Security program because we were elected after 1984.

Additionally, it is completely untrue that members of Congress, during their retirement, will receive 100 percent of their full salary. For members who fall under the pre-1983 CSRS program, those who are vested after a period of five years and have reached age 62 are eligible to receive only 12 percent of their salary, an amount that increases to 80 percent only if they serve in Congress for 32 years or longer.

For those members elected after 1984 and who participate in FERS, the retirement pension ranges from 8.5 percent of their salary for only a short tenure up to 34 percent of their salary after serving in Congress for 20 years. For each year after 20 years in which a member serves, an additional one percent of their salary is included in their pension.

So in short, what does this mean in hard numbers? Put simply, congressmen and senators don't retire with the expectation of receiving their full salary over the remainder of their lifetime.

In fact, it is far, far less.

I certainly hope this information helps to clarify concerns any of you may have had regarding the issue of congressional retirement. It is, of course, difficult to combat a rumor that has gained so

much momentum over the years.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.